

The INQUIRER

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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7709 November 1 2008

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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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Inquiring Words

Spirit of Hope and Peace, we remember that the Spirit, Grace and Teaching of Peace lie within us and around us everywhere. May the Spirit of Peace flow through aspects of our lives, awakening us to all the joys and possibilities of life, that each day we are raised in life, renewed.

— *The Rev Simon John Barlow*

Simon John, a Unitarian minister since 1997, died unexpectedly on 16 October. He was a wise and well-loved member of the Unitarian community. A full obituary will appear in the 15 November issue of The Inquirer.

Executive Committee election

This is the list of candidates running for election to the General Assembly Executive Committee, along with the organisations which nominated them. Eight of the 11 candidates will be elected.

Joan Cook, St Mark's Unitarian Church

Jim Corrigall, Golders Green Unitarians

Elisabeth (Lis) Dyson Jones, The South East Wales Unitarian Society

Dot Hewardine, Chorley Unitarian Chapel

Andrew Pakula, Newington Green Unitarian Church

The Rev Dr Ann Peart, Cross Street Chapel Manchester

Louise Rogers, Newcastle Under Lyme Meeting House

Sir Peter Soulsby, Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel Leicester

Alison Thursfield, Midland Union of Unitarian & Free CC

The Rev Dr David Usher, London District and Provincial Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches

Howard Wilkins, Hinckley Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel

According to Anne Hock, managing director of Popularis Ltd., which is running the election, a nomination was received from Peter John Royle, sponsored by Dunham Road Chapel, Altrincham. She said, 'The supporting nomination was incomplete and he is therefore not eligible to stand as a candidate in the election.'

The ballot period for electing new members of the General Assembly Executive Committee begins on 8 November. See the 15 November issue of *The Inquirer* for a report on the candidates, in time to review before voting closes on 13 December.

With thanks

This colour issue of *The Inquirer* was paid for by a legacy from the will of Irene Hornby, a longtime Unitarian activist (and *Inquirer* contributor), who recently died. Her obituary, written by Alan Curren, appeared in the 18 October issue of *The Inquirer*.

On the cover

Members of the Macclesfield congregation gather for a Harvest Service. Photo by Jim Corrigall.

Growing congregations: part one

Spiritual sharing creates a family

What makes for a successful Unitarian congregation?

Jim Corrigall travelled to Macclesfield to find out.

Voces rang out from the pews along the three sides of the chapel:

"I'm grateful for my children."

And: "I'm grateful for the love I've been given here."

Another expressed gratitude for a warm and loving family.

And then a voice from behind me: "I'm grateful for a place I can bring Ben, and he can make a noise and people don't worry about it."

A burst of laughter followed because young Ben had indeed been making a noise, and it was true that no-one seemed to mind.

We were at Sunday morning service in the great, wood-panelled chapel of King Edward Street in Macclesfield, and the minister had asked people to say one thing in their life they were grateful for at that moment. The spontaneity and the humour seemed to epitomise the style of the Unitarian congregation in Macclesfield – and its minister, the Rev Michael Dadson.

As the chapel's literature states, Michael is minister *with* the Unitarians at Macclesfield (not 'of' or 'at'). This evokes partnership and sharing, and also informality. Yet at the same time, there's evidence of highly-tuned organisation at King Edward Street.

A bookmark on each pew displays the chapel's Covenant – a simple brief statement of belief, but clearly the product of much effort and thought. The bookmark is part of a range of chapel publicity, all simply and beautifully produced.

The Minister with the Unitarians at Macclesfield surprises me (and the congregation too it seems) during this harvest



Chapel President Eila Forrester confers with Minister Michael Dadson. Photo by Jim Corrigall

service. Michael ascends to the high pulpit and yet doesn't deliver any sermon or address. Instead, he leads with a series of linked meditations and readings around the theme of autumn, evoking the beauty and mystery of life.

I was spending a weekend in Macclesfield, with the Unitarians, to gain an understanding of this community. My visit began on Saturday just after midday – Michael had arranged an open lunch at the chapel, so that I could hear from members about life at King Edward Street.

Amid the enthusiasm and the buzz, it was clear that people are experiencing genuine spiritual growth. This, in turn, has created (I kept hearing from members) a congregation that feels like a family. (Some of their accounts appear on page 5.)

Membership at Macclesfield Unitarians is around 40, that's not much more than when Michael started out three years ago – but average attendance at Sunday services has risen to about 20. So growth is modest numerically, but what makes this Unitarian congregation stand out is the spiritual development taking place.

I was able to meet up later with the chapel's President, Eila Forrester, a congregational member for more than 30 years and a former lay leader at the chapel. She is from a distinguished Unitarian family; her father was John Kielty, himself a former minister at King Edward Street – and general secretary of the General Assembly for 20 years.

Eila recalled for me Michael Dadson's arrival three years ago. She told me she put it to him then that the congregation lacked cohesion and energy – and that what was needed was a strategic approach.

"We wanted a minister to share the workload of running community life – not to mend our boiler, but to mend our souls. Michael launched himself into this task – and the congregation responded immediately. It was like a marriage made in heaven."

Michael tells me that he felt Eila was, from the start, giving him permission to go ahead and do what he felt was needed. Her support was crucial, he says. "So I told the congregation: 'we need a sense of cohesion, identity, belonging ... and from

(Continued on next page)

Growing congregations

This is the first in a planned series on successful Unitarian communities around the country. The focus will be on several congregations where all kinds of growth is taking place – not just the numerical kind. These communities are simply examples. Their ideas are offered as 'best practices' from which other groups may draw inspiration.

Covenant binds congregation together

(Continued from previous page)

this will come renewed energy'."

Michael already believed in the power of covenants for congregations – and he proposed that they should develop their own. It was forged through a series of congregational meetings and many drafts, with all members having a say, and all eventually agreeing the final version. (This Covenant appears on the right.)

And it has been renewed each year at a special Covenant service, when new members make a declaration of their reasons for joining. (Four new members joined the chapel last year, and five this year.) Michael feels the Covenant has bound the congregation more closely together.

The other key feature of the chapel is the formation of groups. Michael sees ministry as essentially about *conversation*, and working in small groups is central to this, he says. At least five new groups now meet regularly, all involve spiritual sharing – but each has its own style and focus. These groups are: Signposts (described in chapel literature as 'to support one another's day-to-day spiritual awareness'); Credo ('to help one another's thinking and behaving'); Frontiers ('to broaden our spiritual horizons'); Holding Circle ('to hold in heart and mind those needing our care and support'); and Tao ('reflecting upon Taoist teachings').

The Frontiers group evolved from a conventional study group into one aimed at broadening horizons through encounters with other religions and philosophies, often through visits or exchanges. Michael is not afraid to experiment – other groups have been formed but have not lasted.

I attended a session of Signposts, held after the Sunday service. Sitting quietly in a circle, each of us lit a candle in turn and spoke of how we were feeling. I felt everyone present spoke openly – in some cases about everyday concerns, in others about deeper emotions of loss and joy. There were no questions or discussion, just the chance for each member of the circle to speak and to be heard.

Michael sees these groups as developing practical spirituality, a point which congregational members also emphasised. Michael himself is particularly attracted to the Taoist philosophy, with its non-theistic, down-to-earth approach to living. He describes Taoism as 'a manual on how to live'.

Michael appears to relish the busyness of his life – he is at the heart of events at King Edward Street chapel, while also having part-time involvement at Newcastle-under-Lyme, where he takes one service a month. Yet he's keen to emphasise that he wants the congregation to develop the confidence to operate on its own. He quotes from the Tao to the effect that the true leader is one who inspires people to achieve while remaining unnoticed.

And he contrasts his ministry with his former role as an Anglican vicar (in the 1980s). "Form was all important then – I felt I couldn't open up. Now my work is all about opening up possibilities for people."

'We wanted a minister to share the workload ... to mend our souls ... It was like a marriage made in heaven.'

– Eila Forrester

Covenant of King Edward Street Unitarian Chapel, Macclesfield

'We are an open and welcoming community of diverse individuals who together nurture one another's lifelong spiritual growth.'

In our actions as a community we are working to achieve reason and understanding, freedom and respect, acceptance and harmony, inclusion and social justice.'

Michael is well supported by the management structure at King Edward Street. He has a Supervisor, Judith Burrows, a chapel committee member, and a legal manager in her professional life, with whom he meets each month. Judith told me their meetings had initially been fairly formal but she acts now more as a 'sounding board' for the minister, as he talks of his hopes and plans for the chapel community. Both said how much they valued these meetings, and Michael made clear he is well supported too by the committee and its chairman (who was away on the weekend I visited).

The chapel is also supported by the national structures of the General Assembly – for example, its new leaflets were funded by the Communications Commission as part of a pilot project. The members I spoke to did not paint a purely rosy picture of life at King Edward Street. The chapel faces problems common to many of our worship places: how to bring in more young people and keep them involved; older people not attending much beyond worship services; newer members not having a tradition of regular worship attendance.

But Michael feels there can be solutions to these apparent problems. He is keen to hold congregational lunches more regularly, with a choice of activities on offer, appealing to a range of interests and ages – from tai chi to 'spiritual art'. Only one such lunch has been held so far, but he sees potential here for breaking down barriers.

The chapel suffers from having no hall and no kitchen, and despite its historic status, has at last been given the go-ahead to build an extension and re-arrange the space within to create a hall, kitchen, indoor toilets and a small meeting room. This will make congregational lunches a much easier undertaking!

And the extension will also allow more events involving the wider community, as well as lettings. The hope is that this will encourage more outreach – and in turn new kinds of growth for the Macclesfield Unitarian congregation.

Jim Corrigall is a member of the Golders Green congregation.

Macclesfield voices of spirit



Judith Burrows

'Here you engage your brain'

'I think the new groups have changed the dynamic at the chapel, but I don't feel disadvantaged by not being part of them. This community is very important to me – in many ways it's like a family – and families don't do everything together.'

'The Sunday service lasts all week for me – it makes me examine myself and how I relate to others. In our worship, you are always presented with something unexpected. For example, I still vividly recall a service Michael took on questions being more important than answers – and I often think back to Michael 'bowing to the question'.'

'Conventional church services don't make you think. Here at King Edward Street, you have to engage your brain.'

Judith Burrows has been attending Macclesfield Unitarians about four years; she works as a lawyer, and manages a legal team in Greater Manchester. She serves on the chapel committee, and is the minister's supervisor. She leads a busy life and normally attends Sunday worship and committee meetings (and the publicity group). Judith was originally confirmed as an Anglican.

'A deepening, practical spirituality'

'Practical spirituality is what we care about here, and what we are developing. For example, in the Frontiers group, we've recently visited a mosque and a local Tibetan Buddhist community, and have had creative activity sessions including photography. Our spirituality is deepening and, at the same time, it feels safe.'

'It's good for our spiritual growth that Michael doesn't over-intervene – he will often show us a model, but then let us get on with it. It would be easy to lean on Michael, he's such a good minister, but he's trying to teach us to work together and do things for ourselves.'

'We do have disagreements here, and they can be deep and profound. But they are not brushed under the carpet – they are raised, brought into the open and then we try to resolve them.'

Chris Moore has been a member of the chapel for 12 years. He has served on the committee in the past, but is not on it at present. He prefers to concentrate on the spirituality groups, particularly Frontiers and the Holding Circle. Chris was raised a Roman Catholic, and has for many years been interested in eastern religion.



Chris Moore

'A place where I can be myself'

'For me this chapel has a genuine spirituality that is ever-present, because of the way we relate to each other. I know I can come here and be myself, whether I'm feeling grumpy or tearful, I can still come.'

'Our minister, Michael, has a relaxed approach to worship, and his services feel **real** – they are connected to my life. When a service ends, I continue to explore what I have experienced in the service within our spiritual groups. These groups have transformed our community; we share our struggles together and we have deepened our understanding of each other.'

'Spirituality is the core of my life – it's about everything we do, say and think, the way we engage with others, the way we manage our lives.'

Stephanie Ramage has been a member of the chapel for 30 years, and is a member of its management committee. She has worked as a teacher, in a music shop and as a veterinary receptionist. She has had a life-long involvement in creative work and is particularly interested in fabric art.



Stephanie Ramage

Gellionnen update

Vandals seek chapel members

Members of Gellionnen Chapel, which was brutally vandalised in March, met with two of the teens responsible for damage which will take years to repair. **Marian Littlepage** writes her personal reaction to being asked to forgive.

I was recently telephoned by PC David Williams. He is a member of the Swansea Youth Offending Service and he told me that two of the youngsters involved in trashing Gellionnen Chapel had expressed a wish to apologise.

These were not the main perpetrators, but a 16-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl who would come with their mothers to meet us in the back room of the local library. I agreed to the meeting, but said I would have preferred to meet in the chapel itself. David said this option had been considered but since it would not be easy to get together 'in the round', then the library was better suited. There would be no hiding behind pillars or pews. Staff members of the Youth Offending Service are very keen and hopeful that helping offenders to acknowledge their misdeeds will also cause them to think before ever doing the same things again.

Three members of Gellionnen were chosen. I'm not sure on what basis, but there was Lewis Rees, our lay pastor, Clive Evans, chapel chairman with a lifetime connection with the chapel, and I. My husband, Beverley, and daughter, Sian, are buried in the graveyard. Beverley often took services at the chapel.

We all three duly presented ourselves. The two youngsters were a little late. Lewis, Clive and I were asked to say how we felt, bearing in mind that we should consider the crime, not the offenders. This we did, and one of the mothers was tearful. Her son is to go and live in Berkshire with his father. The up side of this is that he has an opportunity to train as a car mechanic. He had not offended before and was told by the police that they do not expect to come across him again. He is a good-looking lad and I feel things could go right for him. My anxiety is that his father might not find it easy to cope. Does he have another partner and family? Does he live in a bed-sit?

'I am not sure how the meeting has touched the two youngsters, but certainly it took away my angry feelings. I found myself giving them a hug and wishing them well.'

– Marian Littlepage



This window, which had been in the chapel since 1802, was pushed through its frame by the vandals.

Has all this happened with too little warning? Certainly his mother was shocked and saddened that she has to hand her son over to his dad.

The girl, wearing too much makeup, looked considerably older than her 13 years. I found myself wondering if her mother also looked older than her years. Sometimes people grow up faster than they might. The girl's school attendance is sketchy, but, despite this, her mother said the girl would like to become a doctor. With sights set so unrealistically, she could be doomed to failure for the rest of her life. I have to say that I felt irritated, having lived all my married life with a doctor and knowing how very hard he worked and studied.

I am not sure how the meeting has touched the two youngsters, but certainly it took away my angry feelings. I found myself giving them a hug and wishing them well.

David and Ron from the Youth Offending Service called on me some days later. I like their positive approach. They asked if I would be prepared for a visit from some sort of 'evaluation person or persons' – people who are assessing the effectiveness of this approach to youth offenders and I have agreed. I reported back to the congregation in an open service, when anyone present is welcome to provide words or music for sharing.

A benefit for refurbishment of the chapel, featuring the folk singer John Alderslade, is planned for this month. Our thanks to all in the movement who have sympathised with, cared for and thought about us – and are still doing so.

Marian Littlepage is a member of the congregation at Gellionnen.

'forgiveness President's appeal

Friends,

I know you will remember how shocked and unbelieving we all were earlier this year at the news of the utter devastation wreaked by vandals at the remote Unitarian Chapel on Gellionnen Mountain in West Glamorgan.

As you can imagine, obtaining insurance assessments and accurate estimates for refurbishment has proved an involved and lengthy process for this small Unitarian community to undertake. I do know that some Unitarian groups and individuals were quick to respond with donations towards restoration, but the time has now come for a more organised national response. If each Unitarian community which has not so far contributed could, over the next few months, run a special fund-raising event or take a retiring collection at a well-attended service of worship, the collective result would provide a huge boost to the spirits of the Gellionnen congregation and their leader, Lewis Rees, who face such an enormous reconstruction task.

This is a rallying call for all Unitarians to demonstrate their support for maintaining this ancient and important sanctuary of Unitarian witness. I know you can be relied upon to respond generously.

Please make out your cheques to the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and post to: Gellionnen Appeal c/o Mary-Jean Hennis, General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex St, London, WC2R 3HY

If you would like further information, then please contact Lewis Rees, the Lay Person in Charge at Gellionnen Chapel via email at lewis_rees@yahoo.com

Joyce Ashworth

President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.



The carved wood pulpit at Gellionnen Chapel was destroyed. The vandals, who spent hours inside the remote chapel, threw paint on the walls and memorials, broke apart pews and pushed out a 12-foot-tall window.

Fellowship members go on a Peace Pilgrimage

By Rowan Songsmith

The Leicester Unitarian Fellowship was recently invited to be part of a Peace Pilgrimage, visiting various places of worship, organised by Leicester Council of Faiths. It was quite exciting!

The Hindu Temple was bursting with people and with life and music, in the midst of a festival which is organised annually by lorry drivers. We were taken into the worship space, which was beautiful, with many wonderful statues portraying different aspects of one god. They were all decorated with colourful flower garlands.

Next, we visited a Sikh Gurudwara, where we had to wear a head covering and take off our shoes. Here, we were served delicious food for lunch, this offering being available for anyone who comes to a Gurudwara. Then we went to their worship space, to see the Guru Sahib Granth, the Sikh Holy book which is revered as a living guru. It has a priest in attendance 24/7, as it has to be available at all times for anyone wishing to read it, and is always opened at random when read. We had hardly any time to hear much more about Sikhism, however, and I had really wanted to know about the dagger that the priest was wearing!

After this, we were whisked off to the one orthodox synagogue in Leicester (there is also a reform synagogue), where the men in the group had to put on skull caps, and we listened to a representative who talked to us about the history of the synagogue and of Jews in Leicester. We were each given a printed info page to take away, which was informative about Judaism and its beliefs. For instance, there is a bath beneath the synagogue, used mainly by women to bathe in, after the 'impurity' of menstruation has finished each month, before they are allowed to resume marital relations. Lastly, we visited a Christian Church, the Seventh Day Adventists, who meet on the Sabbath day and are big on God and the Devil, on sin and being born again.

The highlight was that the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Manjula Sood, was here to meet us. Manjula is an inspiration and role model for many women, and particularly Asian women, overcoming tragedy and obstacles in her life to become Britain's first Asian woman Lord Mayor. She has also always been most interested and supportive of the Leicester Unitarian Fellowship and our gatherings.

In every place of worship we visited, we were given a warm welcome and, in most cases, were invited back to learn more about the faiths. The Peace Pilgrimage wasn't quite what I was expecting, but it was valuable in making contacts, and we are busy making plans for our engagement group to visit and to experience the equivalent of others' 'Gatherings'. Also, people in the group were very interested in us and our gatherings, so we may well grow a little more ourselves!

Rowan Songsmith is a member of the Leicester Unitarian Fellowship.

'Hindu Unitarian' was architect of India

By Jim Corrigall

Unitarians were well represented at a special ceremony in Bristol, in September, for the unveiling of the newly-restored tomb of one of India's greatest reformers, Rammohun Roy. The occasion marked the 175th anniversary of his death, and about 140 people crowded round the elaborate mausoleum at Arnos Vale cemetery for the ceremony.

The Indian High Commissioner to the UK, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, inaugurated the repaired tomb, paying tribute to the great contribution the 'Raja' (as Roy was known) had made to the moulding of modern India.

Raja Rammohun Roy, who described himself as a 'Hindu Unitarian', founded the Brahmo Samaj Hindu reform movement and worked throughout his life for political and social reform, and especially for women's rights. He is perhaps most famous for the decisive role he played in having widow-burning ('sati') outlawed in India. While on an extended visit to Britain, he died in Bristol in 1833 at the home of the Unitarian Minister, Lant Carpenter, and his daughter Mary.

Among other speakers at the ceremony were: the Lord Mayor of Bristol, Cllr Christopher Davies; leaders of the Brahmo Samaj in the UK; and the Unitarian ministers, the Revs Lindy Latham (Bristol) and Feargus O'Connor (Golders Green in London). Brahmo Samaj singers performed three traditional Tagorean songs.



Brahmo Samaj singers perform traditional Tagorean songs at the ceremony. (below) The restored tomb in its natural Bath stone. It is built in the style of a traditional Bengali chattri, or funeral monument. Photos by Jim Corrigall

Roy's elaborate tomb was designed by a Bristol merchant in the authentic style of a Bengali *chattri*, or funeral monument, and was financed by Dwarkanath Tagore. Its present-day restoration was made possible by a donation of £50,000 from Kolkatta businesspeople, Aditya and Monica Poddar.

Arnos Vale Cemetery trustee and historian Carla Contractor, (who is also a Unitarian), has been the driving force in the restoration programme. She said Rammohun Roy was rightly regarded as the founder of modern India – and it was absolutely fitting that 'this great monument has been safeguarded for future generations'.

She told the crowd gathered round the mausoleum about the restoration work, which had included strengthening the brick vault at its base, replacing the rusted iron bars supporting the columns with stainless steel ones, and removing the green and purple paint in which the entire mausoleum had been coated in 1871.

The original mausoleum had been built with Bath stone, and it was important to its authenticity that it was restored to its natural beauty, she said.

A coach party of Brahmo Samaj members and Unitarians who had travelled from London for the event went afterwards to see the prominent statue of Raja Rammohun Roy on College Green in the centre of Bristol, near the Anglican cathedral, and then on to view the Carpenter home where the Raja died

Jim Corrigall is a member of Golders Green



Global Chalice Lighting

The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists announces the 63rd in its monthly series of global chalice lighting readings. Every month, a reading is distributed to Unitarian and Universalist congregations around the world. Each congregation is asked to use the reading for one worship service in the designated month, identifying it as the 'Global Chalice Lighting' for that month and naming the group which submitted it. It is hoped that the ICUU Global Chalice Lighting Project will enhance the worship experience in our congregations and raise awareness of the international dimensions of our religious movement. This Global Chalice Lighting is to be used during November 2008.

May this chalice, that we are lighting here together, pervade and light this place, showing in our hearts the right direction to take, that we not forget during the following week.

May its rays of light shine deeply in our souls, kindling new wisdom and new projects inside us that symbolise the light of duty and understanding and the magnificence of justice and truth, and bringing peace to us.

*– From the Coruña congregation
Unitarian Universalist Society of Spain
(<http://uuespana.googlepages.com>)*

5 dogs, 4 tortoises and a cat at service

By Feargus O'Connor

The Rev Dr Marcus Braybrooke, president of the World Congress of Faiths delivered the keynote address at this year's annual interfaith celebration of animals on 14 September at Golders Green Unitarians.

Lighting a candle for all the world's animals, Dr Braybrooke, who is also co-founder of the Three Faiths Forum, spoke of the vital importance of universal compassion for all sentient beings. He affirmed that this is a common thread in all the world's great religions, which teach us to practise 'respect, non-violence and self-giving in our dealings with all living beings and with Nature itself.'

Referring to the dangers of global warming and irreversible damage to our mother planet, he said 'nothing less than a spiritual revolution' was required to combat these threats to our common future. Dr Braybrooke concluded his eloquent and moving address with these words: *It is an awareness of our oneness with all life and with the Source of Being that will inspire our compassion and energy to rediscover the way to live in harmony with Nature, ensuring that it is protected for future generations and that all beings are valued and their right to life is respected. To share in shaping such an Earth community in which all life is held precious is today's exciting and challenging call to all people of faith.'* Each of the world's faith traditions proclaims the central importance of compassion for all our fellow creatures. Buddhists, Jains, Hindus and Sikhs all see the common kinship of non-human animals and our own species and our own place in the universal cycle of life and rebirth. Each of these Eastern traditions of religious wisdom extends the Golden Rule to all creation, not just the one species to which we happen to belong.

'We bow to all beings with great reverence in the thought and knowledge that God enters into them through fractioning Himself as living creatures', we read in the Hindu epic the Mahabharata: an ethic truly in the spirit of the Mahatma, Gandhi himself.

'One act of pure love in saving life is greater than spending the whole of one's life in religious offerings', affirms the Buddha in the Dhammapada.

The Jain reading related the story of the venerable founder of the Jain religion in ancient India. A contemporary of the Buddha, Mahavira was the son of a rajah. He was on his way to marry a beautiful princess when he saw many animals, cruelly packed tight in cages and enclosures, looking frightened and miserable.

'Why are all these animals who desire to be free and happy penned up in these cages?' he asked his charioteer.

'They are to furnish a feast for your wedding', the charioteer replied.

Full of compassion, Mahavira reflected: 'If for my sake all these living creatures are killed, how shall I obtain happiness?' Then and there, he renounced his princely privileges, cast aside his fine clothes, gave away his property and vowed to pursue a life of compassion. He sought to propagate a religion which would benefit all living beings in a spirit of loving kindness.

The teachings of Mahavira can be summed up in one sentence from the Jain scriptures: 'This is the quintessence of wisdom: do not kill any creature.' This doctrine of Ahimsa, adopted by the Mahatma Gandhi, prescribes absolute non-violence.



Among the congregation at the interfaith celebration of animals were humans representing the major faiths, five dogs, four tortoises and a cat. Photo by Richenda Barbour

ence. 'All breathing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain or treated with violence, abused or tormented. This is the supreme unchangeable law.'

Such an attitude of universal benevolence was echoed in the words of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian speakers. The vision of universal peace of the Prophet Isaiah (11: 6-9) inspired the modern rabbinic wisdom featured in the Jewish reading and our Muslim speaker told us of the tradition of care and concern for all God's creatures dating back to the Prophet of Islam himself, whose solicitude for animal welfare is reflected in several touching stories.

The Christian tradition at its noblest was expressed in Dr Albert Schweitzer's Nobel Peace Prize address in his message, reminiscent of Francis of Assisi, of universal compassion, 'in which all ethics must take root': a compassion that 'can attain its full breadth and depth if it embraces all living creatures'.

This was also illustrated in the numerous charming and moving stories of the Irish Celtic saints and their love of, and protection of animals and birds and their delight in the beauties of nature recounted in the old Irish annals and legends.

The service was led by the Rev Feargus O'Connor, Hon. Secretary of the WCF, and among those delivering prayers and readings from the world's religions were the Sikh scholar, Dr Charanjit Ajit Singh, and the Rev Dr Richard Boeke, former WCF Chair and Hon Secretary, who also delivered a warm, witty and wise vote of thanks in the inimitable Boeke style so well-loved in international interfaith circles.

Among the congregation, in which all the world's major faiths were represented, were five dogs, including a retired guide dog called Brooke, who is a regular worshipper at GGU and who always stands for the hymns, four relaxed tortoises and a regal elderly cat called Channelle, who sensibly slept throughout most of the proceedings.

Delicious vegetarian Indian food was donated by a Muslim well-wisher and the voluntary collection raised £200 for the Universal Kinship Fund of the Dr. Hadwen Trust for Humane Research and the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, founded by the Rev Prof Andrew Linzey, the eminent theologian who sent greetings and who will be the keynote preacher at next year's interfaith animal celebration on 6 September 2009 at Golders Green Unitarians.

The Rev Feargus O'Connor is minister at Golders Green.

Children's story

Advice from a talking bird -- why not?

By Bill Darlison

Once upon a time, there lived a man who was very proud of his garden. Every day he would stroll around it, admiring the beautiful flowers, the majestic trees, and the plump vegetables. He tended his garden with loving care, pruning the branches of the trees, watering the flowers, pulling out the weeds, mowing the lawn, planting and picking the vegetables at the proper season. All the neighbours admired his garden, and people would come from miles around just to have a look at such a perfect example of the gardener's skill.

One day, as he was taking his customary stroll round his garden, he noticed that some of his precious flowers had been pecked off their stems, and their beautiful petals were lying on the ground, shrivelling in the sun. 'What can have happened?' he asked himself. 'While I was sleeping, some animal or other got into my garden and has been destroying my flowers!' Instead of going to bed that night, he decided to hide in the bushes to see if he could catch the culprit.

Just as the sun was rising, he saw a tiny little bird alight on one of his prize rose-bushes and begin to peck away at the lovely red roses. 'Ah! I've caught you, you rascal,' he said to himself, and, creeping softly over to the rose bush, with one swift movement he caught the little bird in his hand. 'Now, I'm going to take you home and cook you for my breakfast,' he said. 'You won't spoil my garden any more!'

But then, something amazing happened. The little bird began to talk! 'Please don't eat me,' it said, in its little squeaky voice. 'I'm only very small and I wouldn't even make one mouthful for a big man like you. If you let me go, I promise not to damage your flowers any more, and, what's more, I'll give you three pieces of advice that will help you throughout your life.'

The gardener was astonished and intrigued, as you can imagine, so he agreed to accept the bird's offer. Opening his hand,



'Sparrow' photo by Mika Laukkonen

he said, 'Okay, I'll let you go. Now give me the advice.'

The little bird sat on the gardener's open hand and began to speak. 'First,' it said, 'don't worry about things that are finished. It's a waste of energy. It's like crying over milk that's been spilled; no amount of tears is going to put it back in the bottle. Second, never wish for something that you know you can never have. It will only bring you disappointment. And third, never believe what you know cannot possibly be true.'

With that, the little bird flew off into the branches of a nearby tree, where it began to speak again. 'Oh, you fool!' it squawked. 'If you had carried out your original intention and cooked me for breakfast, you would have found that inside me there is a diamond as big as a goose's egg. You could have sold the diamond and never wanted for money for the rest of your life! You are such an idiot!'

'Oh, what have I done?' thought the gardener. 'I've thrown away the chance to become fabulously rich. I must try to get that bird back in my hands!'

'Little bird,' he said, in his most cajoling manner, 'please come back. I'm sorry I frightened you. I promise that I won't hurt you, and you can peck at my flowers any time you like!'

'You really are a fool,' replied the bird. 'You've already forgotten the three pieces of advice I gave you. You're regretting the fact that you let me go, but this is like crying over spilled milk, and I told you that you should never do that. And you're wishing for something that you can never have, because I'm certainly never coming back to you, no matter what you promise, so save your breath. But what shows that you are really stupid is that you've forgotten the most important piece of advice: never believe what you know can't possibly be true. I said there was a diamond as big as a goose's egg inside me, but a goose's egg is bigger than I am! How could I possibly have one inside me? You really are a fool!'

And with these words the little bird flew away. The gardener never saw the bird again, but he never forgot its wise words.

The Rev Bill Darlison is minister at the Dublin congregation.



Barry Brown of Nazareth Chapel, Padiham, presents a cheque on behalf of the chapel for £750 to Jackie Northover of N.W. Air Ambulance from the proceeds of last year's concert series. Also in the picture are the Mayor and Mayoress of Burnley along with some members of the organising Committee.

The Concert was given by Nigel Ogden, well known presenter of The BBC programme 'The Organist Entertains' who played to a packed receptive audience on the greatly enlarged organ having an additional 20 theatre-type stops. The next concert will be 15th November when the highly acclaimed and much travelled Blackburn Salvation Army Band and soloists will be performing. Tickets are available from 01282 773336 or 773184.

Tercentenary at Leicester Great Meeting

By Arthur Stewart

On Saturday, 4 October, more than 100 individuals filled the pews at Great Meeting, Leicester, with an overspill in the balcony, to join with the minister and congregation in celebrating the 300th anniversary of the chapel building. The service began with the Chairman, Sir Peter Soulsby MP, welcoming the assembly and its honoured guests, The Lord Mayor of Leicester, Cllr Manjula Sood, the President of the General Assembly, Mrs Joyce Ashworth, and the Chief Executive, the Rev Steve Dick.

The Rev Arthur Stewart preached the sermon and led the service, which featured musical contributions from A Blackett-Howe and organist Qyan Aranachellum. Dr David Wykes, president of the congregation, spoke about the historical background of the building and, at the end of the service, introduced the special guests, who each bore greetings and good wishes. The Lord Mayor in particular spoke of her long association with Great Meeting and expressed her pride in the multicultural open-mindedness which has enabled her, as a Hindu, to feel at home in Chapel. She recalled how many mayors of Leicester had emerged from Great Meeting, (Somewhere in the region of nine, in total.) and said how proud she was herself, not only to be the first female Asian Lord Mayor in the UK, but to count herself as part of the congregation.

On this memorable occasion, the chapel had been delightfully decorated with flower arrangements on every table, pedestal, pew and even pulpit, and honoured guests were presented with posies.

After the service, all present adjourned to the garden room (opened in 2001) to enjoy a delicious tea of sandwiches, savouries and a variety of home-made cakes.



Above: GA President Joyce Ashworth speaks while (l-r) Arthur Stewart, Lord Mayor Manjula Sood, David Dykes and the Rev Steve Dick look on. Right: Sir Peter Soulsby greets the Lord Mayor.

Members of the congregation experienced a genuine sense of warmth, a buzz of excitement and a degree of satisfaction that this special milestone in the chapel's history had been marked so successfully.

In thanking everyone who had played a part in the tercentenary celebration preparations, Dr Stewart said that the 2008 anniversary would have delighted those worthy forebears who 300 years ago might not have dared to imagine that their construction of a place of worship, in a then-orchard on the outskirts of town, would have gone on to make such a considerable mark on the history of Leicester, and an indelible impression on the lives of everyone associated with it.

The Rev Dr Arthur Stewart is minister at Leicester Great Meeting.



Great Meeting congregation expresses faith

We believe that:

- In Leicester we continue the long-standing liberal tradition of Unitarian values and practices - and seek to share them with others.
- Our Chapel is a place of prayer; of hymn-singing and of reasoned religious reflection. It is a place in which to pause; to seek tranquillity, and for each to explore their own spiritual path in life.
- We are a congregation of free-thinkers - unimpeded by

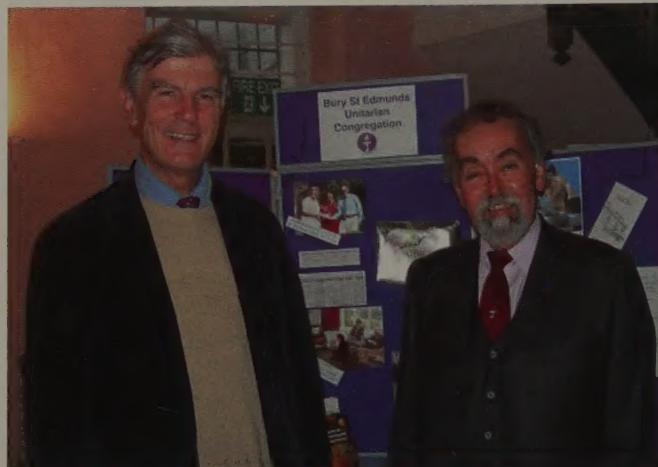
creed or dogma. We reject the imposition of a particular religious view on any individuals or groups and encourage freedom of thought and tolerance of other peoples' ideas.

- Drawing particularly on Christian and humanist traditions, we respect other faiths and beliefs. Through our services of worship every Sunday and good social fellowship, we meet to encourage one another along the way.

— From the Leicester Great Meeting web site.

News in brief

Bury St Edmunds focuses on human rights



The congregation at Bury St Edmunds has focused recently on human rights. A special service on Human Rights was attended by the Deputy Mayor, Christopher Beazley MEP and Lord Phillips of Sudbury, president of the Eastern Region of the United Nations Association. (Lord Sudbury is above (l) with congregational leader Martin Gienke) Participants lit 30 candles, one for each article of the Declaration of Human Rights and arranged them into a '60' to mark the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration on 10 December 1948. Yasmin Waljee, (below left, with Mary Mackay, secretary of the Bury Group of Amnesty International) a pro bono solicitor at the international law firm, Lovells, spoke at an Amnesty International meeting held at the Meeting House. She urged the use of human rights conventions to change our legal system to alleviate abuses. She lamented the clamp down on civil liberties in the UK and she was grateful that the House of Lords reviewed and threw out legislation, such as the recent decision regarding holding terrorists for 42 days. 'Human Rights is for everyone in this country' she said pointing out the need for vigilance regarding human rights.



Oldham Unitarian sets John Storey's Christmas words to music

A new setting of words by the late John Storey (1935-1997) to music is to be performed by Salford Choral Society at its Christmas concert on 18 December.

Storey's carol, 'Star-led', which is published in The Common Quest, caught the eye of Alan Williams, Reader in Music at the University of Salford and a member of the Oldham Unitarian congregation. He has been commissioned by the BBC Philharmonic to write an oratorio to be performed next year by

the orchestra and the Salford Choral Society.

The Society suggested he provide a 'taster' for their concert this year. His liking for Storey's work led to the choice of 'Star-led'. 'John's words,' he says, 'sum up my somewhat equivocal views about Christmas'. Mrs Sylvia Storey, John Storey's widow, has expressed pleasure at Alan's initiative and hopes the Society will enjoy singing his work. The Common Quest: Selected Writings of John Andrew Storey, was published by The Lindsey Press in 2000.

— Kate Taylor

Tony Rees weds in Southampton

A wedding that took place at Edmund Kell Unitarian Church, Southampton, on 18 October may be of interest to many readers.

The groom, Tony Rees, has for a number of years been a familiar figure at General Assembly meetings and has made several contributions to *The Inquirer*. He is Chairman of the congregation and Secretary of the Southern Unitarian Association.

The bride, Clare Blatchford, still has strong links with South Africa, where she was brought up. Her interests in social affairs, travel and horticulture closely match Tony's. They have known each other for 25 years and first met as neighbours before both of their spouses died. The wedding ceremony was conducted by the Rev Brian Anderson from Portsmouth.

— John Hird

**THE LANCE GARRARD
MEMORIAL LECTURE**

*To commemorate the bicentenary of the death of
Theophilus Lindsey*

**FROM PRAYERBOOK TO PERSONAL PIETY—
The contribution of Theophilus Lindsey to the emergence
of a Unitarian Identity**

To be given by
PROFESSOR GRAYSON DITCHFIELD
of The University Of Kent

At
ESSEX UNITARIAN CHURCH, KENSINGTON
112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8 4RT

On
SUNDAY 16TH NOVEMBER 2008
2pm for 2.30pm

Preceded by Morning Service at 11am conducted by The Rev Jeffrey Lane Gould and the Rev Sarah Tinker to commemorate Theophilus Lindsey followed by lunch offered by the Kensington congregation

All are welcome at any or all of the events. In order to help with catering, please inform Ken Howard tel. 0161 330 1295 or email ken75howard@aol.com by Monday 10th November 2008, if you are able to attend the lunch.